

658 9.7.

A PROSPECT OF SOCIETY.

PROSPECT of SOCIETY.

ONE sink of level avarice shall lie,
And even the worth of kings unhonor'd die.

Yet think not, thus when freedom's isles I state,
I mean to flatter kings, or court the great;
Think not I mean to sap my country's good;
I would not, heaven be witness! if I could.

B

But

2 A PROSPECT OF SOCIETY.

But when I see contention hem the throne,
Abridging kingly power to stretch her own,
When I behold a factious band agree
To call it freedom, when themselves are free];
Senates in blood the code of justice draw,
Laws grind the poor, and opulence the law;
The wealth of climes, where savage nations roam,
Pillag'd from slaves, to purchase slaves at home;
I can't forbear, but all my passions start
To tear the barb that grides my swelling heart;
I can't forbear: but, half a coward grown,
I wish to shrink from tyrants to the throne.

Yes, my lov'd brother, cursed be that hour
When first ambition toil'd for foreign power;
When Britons learnt to swell beyond their shore,
And barter useful men for useless ore,
To shine with splendors that destruction haste,
Like flaring tapers brightening as they waste.
Have we not seen, at pleasure's lordly call,
An hundred villages in ruin fall?



Beheld

A PROSPECT OF SOCIETY. 3

Beheld the duteous son, the fire decay'd,
The modest matron, and the blushing maid,
Forc'd from their homes, a melancholy train,
To traverse climes beyond the western main ;
Where wild Oswego spreads her swamps around,
And Niagara stuns with thund'ring sound ?
Even now, perhaps, as there some pilgrim strays
Through tangling forests, and through dangerous ways ;
Through woods, where beasts divided empire claim,
And the brown Indian takes a deadly aim ;
There, while above the forceful tempest flies,
And all around distressful yellings rise,
The famish'd exile bends beneath his woe,
And faintly fainter, fainter seems to go ;
Casts a fond look where Britain's shores recline,
And gives his griefs to sympathize with mine.
War in each breast, and freedom on each brow ;
How much unlike the sons of Britain now !

Flush'd at the sound, my genius spreads her wing,
And flies where Britain broods the western spring ;

Where

4 A PROSPECT OF SOCIETY.

Where lawns extend that spurn Arcadian pride,
And brighter streams than fam'd Campaspe glide,
There all around the gentlest breezes stray,
There gentle music melts on every spray;
Creation's mildest charms are there combin'd,
Extremes are only in the master's mind;
Stern o'er each bosom reason holds her state.

With daring aims, irregularly great,
I see the lords of mankind pass me by
With haughty port, defiance in their eye,
Intent on high designs, a thoughtful band,
By forms unfashion'd fresh from Nature's hand;
Fierce in a native hardihood of soul,
True to imagin'd right whate'er controul,
While even the peasant boasts these rights to scan,
And learns to venerate himself as man.

Thine, Freedom, thine the blessings pictur'd here,
Thine are those charms that dazzle and endear;
Happy indeed, were such without alloy,
But even from Freedom issuing ills annoy:

Where

That

A PROSPECT OF SOCIETY.

5

That independence Britons prize too high,
Keeps man from man, and cuts the social tie ;
There, though by circling deeps together held,
Minds combat minds, repelling and repell'd ;
Ferments arise, imprison'd factions roar,
Represt ambition struggles round her shore,
Whilst over-wrought, the general system feels
Its motions stopt, or phrenzy fire the wheels:

Nor rest their ills. As social bonds decay,
As duty, love, and honour fail to sway,
Fictitious bonds, the bonds of wealth and law,
Still gather strength, and force unwilling awe.
Hence all distinction's paid to these alone,
Talent must sink, and merit weep unknown ;
Till Time may come, when, stript of all her charms,
That land of scholars, and that nurse of arms ;
Where ancestry avows the noble claim,
And statesmen toil, and poets pant for fame ;
To men of other minds my fancy flies,
Embosom'd in the deep where Holland lies,

6 A PROSPECT OF SOCIETY.

Methinks her patient sons before me stand,
Where the broad ocean leans against the land,
And, sedulous to stop the coming tide,
Lift the tall rampire's artificial pride,
That spreads its arms amidst the swelling main,
And scoops an empire from the watry reign.
Onward methinks, and diligently flow
The firm connected bulwark seems to go;
While ocean pent, and rising o'er the pile,
Sees an amphibious world beneath him smile.
The slow canal, the yellow blossom'd vale,
The willow tufted bank, the gliding sail,
Plains, forests, towns, in gay profusion drest,
A new creation ravish'd from his breast.

Thus, while around the wave-subjected soil
Impels the native to repeated toil,
Industrious habits in each breast obtain,
And industry begets a love of gain.
Hence all the good from opulence that springs,
With all those ills superfluous treasure brings,

A PROSPECT OF SOCIETY. 7

Are here display'd. Their much-lov'd wealth imparts
Convenience, plenty, elegance, and arts;
But turn the medal, craft and fraud appear,
Even liberty itself is barter'd here.
At gold's superior charms all freedom flies,
The needy sell it, and the rich man buys:
A land of tyrants, and a den of slaves,
Here wretches seek dishonourable graves,
And calm beneath their injuries conform,
Dull as their lakes, quiescent in a storm.

Heavens! how unlike their Belgic fires of old!
Rough, poor, content, ungovernably bold;
Where shading elms beside the margin grew,
And freshen'd from the waves the Zephyr blew;
And haply, tho' my harsh touch faltering still,
But mock'd all tune, and marr'd the dancer's skill;
Yet would the village praise my wond'rous power,
And dance, forgetful of the noon-tide hour.
Alike all ages. Dames of ancient days
Have led their children through the mirthful maze,

And

8 A PROSPECT OF SOCIETY.

And the gay grandfire, skill'd in gestic lore,
Has frisk'd beneath the burthen of threescore.

So blest a life these thoughtless realms display,
Thus idly strenuous rolls their world away :
Theirs are those arts that mind to mind endear,
For honour forms the social temper here.
Honour, that praise which real merit gains,
Or even imaginary worth obtains,
Here passes current ; paid from hand to hand,
It shifts its splendid traffic round the land :
From courts to camps, to cottages it strays,
And all are taught an avarice of praise ;
They please, are pleas'd, they give to get esteem,
Till, seeming blest, they grow to what they seem.

But while this softer art their bliss supplies,
It gives their follies also room to rise ;
For praise too dearly lov'd, or warmly fought,
Enfeebles all internal strength of thought,
And the weak soul, within itself unblest,

Leans for all pleasure on another's breast.

Hence

A PROSPECT OF SOCIETY. 9

Hence ostentation here, with tawdry art,
Pants for the vulgar praise which fools impart ;
Here vanity assumes the pert grimace,
And trims her robes of frize with copper lace,
Here beggar pride defrauds her daily cheer,
To boast one splendid dish for once a year ;
And scarce a man is found, who rightly weighs
The solid transports of internal praise.
These are the charms to barren states assign'd ;
Their wants are few, their wishes all confin'd.
Yet let them only share the praises due,
If few their wants, their pleasures are but few ;
Since every want, that stimulates the breast,
Becomes a means of pleasure when possess'd.
Hence from such lands each pleasing science flies,
That first excites desire, and then supplies ;
Unknown to them, when sensual pleasures cloy,
To fill the languid pause with finer joy ;
Unknown those powers that raise the soul to flame,
Catch every nerve, and vibrate through the frame.
Their level life is but a smould'ring fire,
Nor quench'd by want, nor fan'd by strong desire ;

10 A PROSPECT OF SOCIETY.

Unfit for raptures, or, if raptures cheer,
On some high festival of once a year,
In wild excess the vulgar breast takes fire,
Till, buried in debauch, the bliss expire.

But not their joys alone thus coarsely flow :
Their morals, like their pleasures, are but low.
For, as refinement stops, from fire to son
Manners in one unmending track will run,
And love and friendship's finely pointed dart
Fall blunted from each indurated heart,
Some sterner virtues o'er the mountain's breast
May sit, like falcons cowering on the nest ;
But all the gentler morals, such as play
Through life's more cultur'd walks, and charm our way,
These far disperse, on timorous pinions fly,
To sport and flutter in a kinder sky.
To kinder skies, where gentler manners reign,
We turn, where France displays her bright domain.
Thou sprightly land of mirth and social ease,
Pleas'd with thyself, whom all the world can please,

How

A PROSPECT OF SOCIETY. II

How often have I led thy sportive choir,
With tuneless pipe, along the sliding Loire?
No vernal bloom their torpid rocks display,
But winter lingering chills the lap of May;
No Zephyr fondly sooths the mountain's breast,
But meteors glare, and frowning storms invest.
Yet still, even here, content can spread a charm,
Redress the clime, and all its rage disarm.
Though poor the peasant's hut, his feasts though small,
He sees his little lot, the lot of all;
See no contiguous palace rear its head
To shame the meanness of his humble shed;
No costly lord the sumptuous banquet deal
To make him loath his vegetable meal;
But calm, and bred in ignorance and toil,
Each with contracting, fits him to the soil.
Chearful at morn he wakes from short repose,
Breasts the keen air, and carols as he goes;
With patient angle trolls the finny deep,
Or drives his vent'rous plow-share to the steep;
Or seeks the den where snow tracks mark the way,
And drags the struggling savage into day.

At

21 1/2 A PROSPECT OF SOCIETY.

At night returning, every labour sped,
He sits him down the monarch of a shed;
Smiles by his chearful fire, and round surveys
His childrens looks, that brighten at the blaze:
While his lov'd partner, boastful of her hoard,
Displays the cleanly platter on the board;
And haply too some pilgrim, thither led,
With many a tale repays the nightly bed.
Thus every good his native wilds impart,
Imprints the patriot passion at his heart.
Dear in that shed to which his soul conforms,
And dear that hill which lifts him to the storms;
And as a babe, when scaring sounds molest,
Clings close and closer to the mother's breast;
So the loud torrent, and the whirlwind's roar,
But bind him to his native mountains more.
For wealth was theirs, nor far remov'd the date,
When commerce proudly flourish'd through the state:
At her command the palace learnt to rise,
Again the long-fall'n column sought the skies;
The canvass glow'd with animation warm,
The pregnant quarry teem'd with human form.

But, more unstable than the southern gale,
Soon Commerce turn'd on other shores her sail;
And late the nation found, with fruitless skill,
Their former strength was now plethoric ill.

Yet, though to fortune lost, there still abide
Some splendid arts, the wrecks of former pride;
From which the feeble heart and long fall'n mind
An easy compensation seems to find.

Here may be seen, in bloodless pomp array'd,
The paste-board triumph and the cavalcade;
Processions form'd for piety and love,
A mistress or a saint in every grove.

At sports like these are all their cares beguil'd,
The sports of children satisfy the child;
At sports like these, while foreign arms advance,
They proudly swell, and leave the world to chance.

When strenuous aims have suffer'd long controul,
They leave at last, or feebly man the soul;
While low delights, succeeding fast behind,
In happier meanness occupy the mind:

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A

As in those domes, where Cæsars once bore sway,
But now by time dismantled in decay,
Amidst the ruin, heedless of the dead,
The shelter-seeking peasant builds his shed,
And, wond'ring man could want the larger pile,
Exults, and owns his cottage with a smile.

My soul turn from them, turn we to survey
Where rougher climes a nobler race display,
Where the bleak Swiss their stormy mansions tread,
And force a churlish soil for scanty bread ;
No product here the barren hills afford,
But man and steel, the soldier and his sword.
Far to the right, where Appenine ascends,
Bright as the summer, Italy extends ;
Her uplands sloping deck the mountain's side,
Woods over woods, in gay theatric pride ;
While oft some temples mould'ring tops between,
With venerable grandeur marks the scene.

Could Nature's bounty satisfy the breast,
The sons of Italy were surely blest.

Whatever

Whatever fruits in different climes are found,
That proudly rise or humbly court the ground;
Whatever blooms in torrid tracts appear,
That drefs in bright fucceffion round the year;
Whatever sweets falute the northern fky
With vernal leaves that bloffom but to die;
Thefe here difporting, own the kindred foil,
Nor ask luxuriance from the planter's toil;
While fea-borne gales their gelid wings expand
To winnow fragrance round the fmiling land.

But fmall the blifs that fense alone beftows,
And fenfual blifs is all the nation knows.
In rich luxuriance plants and flowers appear,
Men feem the only growth that dwindles here.
Contrasted faults through all their manners reign,
Though poor, luxurious, though fubmiffive, vain,
Though grave, yet trifling, zealous, yet untrue,
And even in penance planning fins anew.
All ills are here to pejorate the mind,
That opulence departed leaves behind;

Nor

Nor less the patriot's boast, where'er we roam,
His first best country ever is at home.

And yet, perhaps, if states with states we scan,
Or estimate their bliss on Reason's plan,
Though patriots flatter, and though fools contend,
We still shall find the doubtful scale depend;
Find that each good, by Art or Nature given,
To these or those, but makes the balance even.

Nature, a mother kind alike to all,
Still grants her blessings at Industry's call;
And though the rigid clime or rough rocks frown,
These rocks, by custom, turn to beds of down.

From Art more various are the blessings sent;
Wealth, splendours, freedom, honor, and content:
Yet these each other's power so strong contest,
That either seems subversive of the rest.
Hence e'ery state, to one lov'd blessing prone,
Chiefly conforms itself to that alone.

Each



